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ABSTRACT

Issues involved in improving administrator preparation programs are described in this ERIC Digest. A literature review identifies appropriate skills and methods for administrator training and summarizes recommendations such as application of theory to practice and development of full-time internships, school/university collaboration, mentorships, and networks of school districts, universities, policymakers, and communities. Increasing the percentage of women and minorities in administrative positions is also discussed. (11 references) (LMI)

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PREPARING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

By Amy Klauke

More than half of all school administrators in the United States will retire during the 1990s. The need to replace them is generating renewed interest in administrator preparation programs and affording a unique opportunity for upgrading current preparation practices. Educators are advocating racially and sexually balanced placement of new administrators, as well as promoting experiential, self-directed, broader-based training programs. Rapid social changes necessitate that administrators commit themselves to a life-long, collaborative learning process.

What Skills and Methods Should Be Emphasized in the Training of School Administrators?

The American Association of School Administrators (Hoyle and others 1985) claims that administrators need to develop skills in the following areas: designing, implementing, and evaluating school climate; building support for schools; developing school curriculum; instructional management; staff evaluation; staff development; allocating resources; and educational research, evaluation, and planning.

In addition, AASA states that administrators must possess a thorough understanding of the learning process, as well as the ability to communicate and cooperate with people of diverse cultures, positions, and perspectives within the school and the community. School administrators should share a common vision about the role and style of twenty-first century schools and about their position within the larger society and world community.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals suggests that the role of future principals will be more that of colleague than boss, and that they will work to "facilitate, support and assist" teachers. NAESP concludes that effective leaders need "a positive, wholesome self-concept that enables them to develop the potential of others without fear and without concern for personal benefit." The report adds that knowledge of changing societal conditions and the global community and the abilities to use political and legal processes and work with parents as partners are crucial to facilitating effective school practices.

How Can Academic Programs Best Prepare Candidates for Administrative Positions?

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (1985), among others, advocates a "substantial increase in the field-based component of preparation programs." In addition, NASSP advises that internships be full-time for at least one academic year.

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (1989) also argues for closer ties between theory and practice, and for student application of critical thinking and inquiry skills to actual school situations. "It is this end, translating sound research strategies into sound practices, that must be addressed in graduate training," providing trainees with hands-on experience and improving their abilities to "recognize, conceptualize and act on problems."

"Mutually dependent relationships between universities and school districts," according to the policy board, "can provide needed sources of free expertise, counsel, and labor for schools, as well as sources of student settings for academe." The board further recommends that preparation programs be grounded in a thorough understanding of the teaching and learning process. In addition, trainees should develop research and organizational skills as well as an understanding of the cultural, ethical, and political dimensions of schooling.

What Are the Advantages of Internships and Mentorships?

Internships offer practical experience to candidates in administrator preparatory programs. Barbara LaCost (1987) states that adult learning is more effective when it is experiential or when it is in response to real needs and problems. LaCost proposes an andragogical or self-directed approach to learning. She outlines three stages to an internship: *Reactive*: Candidate observes a practicing administrator and responds in a seminar with questions, analysis, and reflection on potential to grow into a similar role. *Interactive*: After a candidate decides to pursue training, the trainee works in concert with administrators on specific self-selected projects designed to coordinate formal knowledge development, and to develop the areas targeted for improvement. *Active*: In this stage of internship, candidates assume almost complete responsibility for an administrative role. This phase is accompanied by one or more seminars where interns and professors continue active dialogue on the interrelationship of theory and practice.

A mentorship involves a guided, supportive working relationship between an intern and a school administrator. Jean Pence (1989) recommends that mentors have "at least four successful years as a principal," that they be "interested in participating, be good communicators, be creative and innovative, be knowledgeable about the school, and orient new principals to all aspects of the district and community." "Mentors," she says, "assist rookies with professional growth opportunities and provide support by being on call to answer questions and give suggestions." They are available to give informal, constructive feedback about specific job functions.

James W. Smith (1989) states that mentors must themselves grow during this process, encouraging and learning from interns' constructive criticism of current school practices. He adds that mentors must allow interns to fail and learn from their mistakes.

How Can We Improve the Percentage of Women and Minorities in Administrative Positions?

According to the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (1987), minority enrollments in education preparation programs are failing to increase and are in some instances declining. Fourteen percent of current school administrators are members of a minority population; a mere 6 percent of professors of educational administration are minorities. Although the percentage of women earning doctorates in educational administration has increased to 39 percent, the percentage of women in administrative positions is only 26 percent.

Diana Pounder (1987) says that the most difficult obstacle in placement of minority and women candidates arises from role stereotyping. Professors of educational administration could help to remedy this problem by assuring school boards that women and minorities can be effective and competent administrators and by referring particular candidates from these minority populations. She also recommends placing minority people and women on search teams and replacing nonrelevant search criteria with job-related ones associated with race, sex, or age.

The NPBEA (1989) recommends that administrator preparation programs adopt rigorous recruitment strategies to discover and encourage qualified women and minority candidates to apply for administrator training. Pounder also sees the development of leadership experiences and self-marketing skills among these populations creating equal representation in school administration.

Pence affirms the need for mentors inside and outside educational systems to provide support for minority and women candidates prior to and after their administrative training.

How Can Networking School Districts, Universities, Policymakers, and Communities Prepare School Administrators?

While universities can play an important role in the recruitment, preparation, and continuing education of school administrators, schools can serve as laboratories for university administrator programs. The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration recommends that state and federal governments develop and supplement policies for the recruitment, training, and placement of minorities and women in administrative positions. In addition, business, industry, and public schools could exchange knowledge, specialized personnel, and resources, and could provide technical assistance to administrative trainees.

Educational administration programs must reach out to parents, retirees, school patrons, and others as instructional resources. By maintaining positive interaction with students, staff, and community members, administrators model crucial values of cooperation, communication, and respect for diversity. According to the AASA, educational administration is interactive and dynamic and its knowledge base is constantly being expanded and refined. Candidates must be given encouragement and opportunities to weave continuous, experientially based professional training into their careers in educational administration.

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